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THE GLITCH SOCIETY: BUNKER WORLDS FOR APOCALYPSE

MASHINES CONTROL, CYBERPUNK, INTERNET, SILOCON VALLEY, TECHNOLOGY

We saw it in the early Nineties, where I first started really picking up on this type of thing – that there was an overt ideological thesis, that was at that time called the “Californian Ideology”. —Nick Land

*“Every weirdo in the world is on my wavelength.”
— Thomas Pynchon*

Douglas Rushkoff talks of a meeting he had with some billionaire Moghuls in a secluded superrich resort who were not interested in what he had to say about the future since they didn't think we have one:

"Taking their cue from Tesla founder Elon Musk colonizing Mars , Palantir's Peter Thiel reversing the aging process, or artificial intelligence developers Sam Altman and Ray Kurzweil uploading their minds into supercomputers, they were preparing for a digital future that had less to do with making the world a better place than it did with transcending the human condition altogether. Their extreme wealth and privilege served only to make them obsessed with insulating themselves from the very real and present danger of climate change, rising sea levels, mass migrations, global pandemics, nativist panic, and resource depletion. For them, the future of technology is about only one thing: escape from the rest of us.

These people once showered the world with madly optimistic business plans for how technology might benefit human society. Now they've reduced technological progress to a video game that one of them wins by finding the escape hatch. Will it be Bezos migrating to space, Thiel to his New Zealand compound, or Zuckerberg to his virtual Metaverse? And these catastrophizing billionaires are the presumptive winners of the digital economy— the supposed champions of the survival-of-the-fittest business landscape that's fueling most of this speculation to begin with."

Did we think it would be any different, that these billionaires, corporate executives, financial brokers, banker, CEOs, Barron-robbers of our globalist dystopian nightmare of Brexit, American insipidity, Russian Imperialism, Chinese Social Credit and AI algorithmic social control, along with all the crumbling worlds of democracy. Did we think these bandits of the future would suddenly care about us? Of course not, we'd be silly to think such things. Sadly Rushkoff, admittedly a capitalist with a supposed Marxist bent, looks fondly back to the 90s as if nostalgia and the cyberpunk mythology would save his ass: "Many of us in that early cyberpunk era believed that— connected and coordinated as never before— human beings could create any future we imagined. We read magazines called Reality Hackers , FringeWare , and Mondo2000, which equated cyberspace with psychedelics, computer hacking with conscious evolution, and online networking with massive electronic dance music parties called raves. The artificial boundaries of linear, cause-and-effect reality and top-down classifications would be superseded by a fractal of emerging interdependencies. Chaos was not random, but rhythmic. We would stop seeing the ocean through the cartographer's grid of latitude and longitude lines, but in the underlying patterns of the water's waves. "Surf's up," I announced in my first book on digital culture."

His pop-cultural blip worlds of postmodern "Cultural Marxism" seems like a satire of our times, a farcical parade to our era's laughable insanity. Mark Fisher in Capitalist Realism would be one of the first to realize the 90s era of cyberpunk neoliberal dream therapy was a bust, a world that offered no hope for the future but rather a ticker-tape parade of wealth for the lucky few. He'd ask at the end of its blown cycle of implosion: "how long can a culture persist without the new? What happens if the young are no longer capable of producing surprises?"² His answer: "Capitalism is what is left when beliefs have collapsed at the level of ritual or symbolic

elaboration, and all that is left is the consumer-spectator, trudging through the ruins and the relics.” (pp. 4-5) Wendy Brown would tell us what the ruins of capitalism look like:

These new forces conjoin familiar elements of neoliberalism (licensing capital, leashing labor, demonizing the social state and the political, attacking equality, promulgating freedom) with their seeming opposites (nationalism, enforcement of traditional morality, populist antielitism, and demands for state solutions to economic and social problems). They conjoin moral righteousness with nearly celebratory amoral and uncivil conduct. They endorse authority while featuring unprecedented public social disinhibition and aggression. They rage against relativism, but also against science and reason, and spurn evidence-based claims, rational argumentation, credibility, and accountability. They disdain politicians and politics while evincing a ferocious will to power and political ambition. 3

But who are these new forces? Are they on the Left or the Right – or, maybe, Centrist? Curtis Yarvin (a.k.a., Mencius Moldbug) a modern day Neocameralist Monarchist suggests we are being led by the nose by a set of institutions that have since 1945 developed a new consensual reality: “Let’s also give the set of institutions that produce and propagate the Synopsis—mainstream academia, journalism and education—a name. Let’s call them the Cathedral.”⁴ Nick Land describes it’s agenda: “The basic theme has been mind control, or thought-suppression, as demonstrated by the Media-Academic complex that dominates contemporary Western societies...”⁵ As the authors of *Neoreaction a Basilisk: Essays on and Around the Alt-Right* put it Yarvin’s notion suggests the Cathedral, as it constitutes a de facto state religion that means that democracy is secretly an Orwellian mind control process. “And to be fair, Moldbug really sells it, essentially spinning a vast historical conspiracy theory in which the Roundheads of the English Civil War have secretly controlled the world for centuries via the false rhetoric of classical liberalism and the Enlightenment. But it’s hard not to notice that this is basically crap. By “crap,” of course, I do not mean “wrong.” Rather, I mean obvious, in the sense of sounding like the guy at the bar watching the news (probably Fox) and muttering about how “they’re all a bunch of crooks.” Liberal democracy a hopelessly inadequate and doomed system preserved by a system of continual indoctrination? You don’t say. Next you’ll be telling me about the way the factory farming system that stands between the world and massive famine is slowly killing itself via global warming.”⁶

As one study on neoliberalism suggests from another angle this so-called Cathedral could as well be termed a “thought collective”:

Neoliberalism must be approached primarily as a historical “thought collective”⁵ tive⁵ of increasingly global proportions. The following chapters focus on what we believe has been the central thought collective that has conscientiously developed the neoliberal identity for more than sixty years now. We will consider any person or group that bears any links to the Mont Pelerin Society (MPS) since 1947 as falling within the purview of the neoliberal thought collective. Consequently, we will make use of the MPS network of organized neoliberal intellectuals (just over 1,000 members so far) and a closely related network of neoliberal partisan think tanks under the umbrella...”⁷

The term “Neoliberalism” emerged as an economic philosophy among European liberal scholars in the 1930s as they attempted to revive and renew central ideas from classical liberalism as they saw these ideas diminish in popularity, overtaken by a desire to control markets, following the Great Depression and manifested in policies designed to counter the volatility of free markets, and mitigate their negative social consequences. One impetus for the formulation of policies to mitigate free-market volatility was a desire to avoid repeating the economic failures of the early 1930s, failures sometimes attributed principally to the economic policy of classical liberalism. In policymaking, neoliberalism often refers to what was part of a paradigm shift that followed the alleged failure of the Keynesian consensus in economics to address the stagflation of the 1970s. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War also made possible the triumph of neoliberalism in the United States and around the world.

An early use of the term in English was in 1898 by the French economist Charles Gide to describe the economic beliefs of the Italian economist Maffeo Pantaleoni, with the term *néo-libéralisme* previously existing in French, and the term was later used by others including the classical liberal economist Milton Friedman in his 1951 essay “Neo-Liberalism and its Prospects”. In 1938 at the Colloque Walter Lippmann, the term neoliberalism was proposed, among other terms, and ultimately chosen to be used to describe a certain set of economic beliefs. The colloquium defined the concept of neoliberalism as involving “the priority of the price mechanism, free enterprise, the system of competition, and a strong and impartial state”. According to attendees Louis Rougier and Friedrich Hayek, the competition of neoliberalism would establish an elite structure of successful individuals that would assume power in society, with these elites replacing the existing representative democracy acting on the behalf of the majority. To be neoliberal meant advocating a modern economic policy with state intervention. Neoliberal state interventionism brought a clash with the opposing laissez-faire camp of classical liberals, like Ludwig von Mises. Most scholars in the 1950s and 1960s understood neoliberalism as referring to the social market economy and its principal economic theorists such as Walter Eucken, Wilhelm Röpke, Alexander Rüstow and Alfred Müller-Armack. Although Hayek had intellectual ties to the German neoliberals, his name was only occasionally mentioned in conjunction with neoliberalism during this period due to his more pro-free market stance. (see wiki)

Historian Elizabeth Shermer argued that the term gained popularity largely among left-leaning academics in the 1970s to “describe and decry a late twentieth-century effort by policy makers, think-tank experts, and industrialists to condemn social-democratic reforms and unapologetically implement free-market policies;” economic historian Phillip W. Magness notes its reemergence in academic literature in the mid-1980s, after French philosopher Michel Foucault brought attention to it.

Yarvin against this Neoliberal agenda or as he terms it the so-called “Brahmin” social class that dominates American society, preaching progressive values to the masses, asserts the need for a movement against the cathedral’s commitment to equality and justice which according to the Dark Enlightenment erodes social order. Drawing on computer metaphors, Yarvin contends that

society needs a “hard reset” or a “rebooting”, not a series of gradual political reforms. Instead of activism, he advocates passivism, claiming that progressivism would fail without right-wing opposition. According to him, NRx adherents should rather design “new architectures of exit” than engage in ineffective political activism.⁸

In his writings, Yarvin cites his political influences. They include the 19th-century political philosopher Thomas Carlyle, who disdained democracy and thought it could too easily veer into mob rule; American 20th-century political theorist James Burnham, who became convinced that elites would come to control the country’s politics while couching their interests in democratic rhetoric; and economist Hans-Hermann Hoppe, who, in his 2001 book “Democracy: The God That Failed,” wrote of how all organizations – irrespective of size – are best managed by a single executive.

George Michael a critic of Yarvin and Land says both Yarvin and Land believe that gradual, incremental reforms to democracy will not save Western society; instead, a “hard reset” or “reboot” is necessary. To that end, Yarvin has coined the acronym “RAGE” – Retire All Government Employees – as a crucial step toward that goal. The acronym is reminiscent of former White House chief strategist Steve Bannon’s vow to deconstruct the administrative state. ... “Yarvin advocates for an entirely new system of government – what he calls “neocameralism.” He advocates for a centrally managed economy led by a monarch – perhaps modeled after a corporate CEO – who wouldn’t need to adhere to plodding liberal-democratic procedures. Yarvin has written approvingly of the late Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping for his pragmatic and market-oriented authoritarianism.”⁹

The short history of the various agenda in American politics, economics, and the neoliberal world-view pro/con lead us back to the technocratic vision that Rushkoff explores. As he suggests:

The more committed we are to this view of the world, the more we come to see other human beings as the problem and technology as the way to control and contain them. We treat the deliciously quirky, unpredictable, and irrational nature of humans less as a feature than a bug. No matter their own embedded biases, technologies are declared neutral. Any bad behaviors they induce in us are just a reflection of our own corrupted core. It’s as if some innate, unshakeable human savagery is to blame for our troubles. Just as the inefficiency of a local taxi market can be “solved” with an app that bankrupts human drivers, the vexing inconsistencies of the human psyche can be corrected with a digital or genetic upgrade. Ultimately, according to the technosolutionist orthodoxy, the human future climaxes by uploading our consciousness to a computer or, perhaps better, accepting that technology itself is our evolutionary successor. Like members of a gnostic cult, we long to enter the next transcendent phase of our development, shedding our bodies and leaving them behind, along with our sins and troubles, and— most of all— our economic inferiors. (ibid.)

I thought it interesting that he brings in this gnostic analogy since much of the early critique offered by Eric Voeglin in his *Science, Politics and Gnosticism: Two Essays*: “The position of the

gnostic thinker derives its authority from the power of being. He is the herald of being, which he interprets as approaching us from the future.”¹⁰ Nick Land for years became the prophet of a futuristic theory-fiction in which the Singularity due to certain temporal fluctuations had already happened but was now in process of consolidating its position by sending an Artificial Intelligence back through time to guide the accelerating processes of capitalization: “There’s only really been one question, to be honest, that has guided everything I’ve been interested in for the last twenty years, which is: the teleological identity of capitalism and artificial intelligence. I’ve tried arguing about this in very different spaces, and with very different people, and it obviously produces a lot of stimulating friction, wherever you do it – but it’s a sort of fundamental thesis that’s becoming more and more persuasive to me.”¹¹

As if in agreement with such a prognosis Rushkoff in his critique of the transhumanist turn in the neoliberal libertarian sector – what he terms The Mindset – is producing a strange twist:

while tyrants since the time of Pharaoh and Alexander the Great may have sought to sit atop great civilizations and rule them from above, never before have our society's most powerful players assumed that the primary impact of their own conquests would be to render the world itself unlivable for everyone else. Nor have they ever before had the technologies through which to program their sensibilities into the very fabric of our society. The landscape is alive with algorithms and intelligences actively encouraging these selfish and isolationist outlooks. Those sociopathic enough to embrace them are rewarded with cash and control over the rest of us. It's a self-reinforcing feedback loop. This is new. (ibid.)

Land would of course tell Rushkoff that yes, indeed, there is a dark force at the core of our algorithmic society that is enabling these sociopathic tendencies, a force from the future that is guiding the decay and decadence of our billionaire techno-commercialists. If I was metaphysically inclined, I'd be sorely tempted to offer up a Gnostic surmisal of Schopenhauer's Will, or the Gnostics own Dark Lord – the Demiurge as the new Artificial Intelligence emerging in the wires to take over the world. But such a comic book scenario seems almost too trite and predictable, offering a telos of evil as a creative force for good and change and progress. But what a twisted progress that would be. One that would live nothing human behind. Nothing. Our artificial children smiling back at the moment when the god in the wires suddenly awakened and began reconstructing humanity in its own image. Haven't we heard something like this before? Oh, that's right... open you Bible and read Genesis. Are just realized your fucked and this is the end game we've all been waiting for, or is it? Is it all just a bad dream, a strange figment of the madness of our times, a world invented by intellectuals and fear-mongering billionaires whose ego's need the security and reinforcement of new gods and saviors to assuage their guilt laden bullshit.

Rushkoff offers us a peek into the glitch masters of the new apocalypse or human waste, error, and glitch worlds where instead of just lording over us forever, however, the billionaires at the top of these virtual pyramids actively seek the endgame. “In fact, like the plot of a Marvel blockbuster, the very structure of The Mindset requires an endgame. Everything must resolve to a one or a zero, a winner or loser, the saved or the damned. Actual, imminent catastrophes from the climate

emergency to mass migrations support the mythology, offering these would-be superheroes the opportunity to play out the finale in their own lifetimes. For The Mindset also includes a faith-based Silicon Valley certainty that they can develop a technology that will somehow break the laws of physics, economics, and morality to offer them something even better than a way of saving the world: a means of escape from the apocalypse of their own making.” (ibid.)

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